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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Friday, December 25, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "CHRISTMAS ORANGES, THEN AND NOW." Information from the Market Basket, by the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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At an early hour this Christmas morning, I'll warrant, the bulging stockings came down from the chimney-breast and each child started exploring. If Christmas at your house is anything like Christmas at mine, every child found somewhere in his stocking a bright golden Christmas orange. In our family Christmas oranges have been the rule for more than a generation. The custom was started, I'm told, when oranges were a luxury people seldom enjoyed except during the holidays. I can still remember when they were considered so precious that only half an orange was served to each of us for breakfast!

I wonder what the people of that day would say to the generous glasses of chilled orange juice that we 1936 Americans consume almost daily, to make sure of our vitamins and other protective elements? Or to the baby's regular two tablespoons of orange juice a day? Or to cooked oranges, in sauces, desserts, and preserves? And what would they think of buying oranges by the bushel basket or the crate?

Some of the increased demand for oranges is due to their excellent rating with nutritionists. Oranges and other citrus fruits are among the richest source of vitamin C we have. Everybody should have every day, if possible, the amount of vitamin C contained in a medium-sized orange. As we commonly use oranges without cooking we get all the vitamin C value. That is, if the oranges are not cut or squeezed for juice until just before they are served. Exposure of the juice to air lessens the vitamin C content and changes the flavor. Oranges are also a fair source of vitamins B and G.

So much for food values. The Christmas oranges which are from the fall and midwinter California crop are largely Washington Navels. Some 15 million boxes in all are reported from California, and that's only part of the State's 1937 crop. Almost every one of these Washington Navel oranges is descended from two "parent" trees planted in Riverside, California, about 60 years ago. One of the two parent trees is still standing. A sister tree of the same group can be seen in the Department of Agriculture greenhouses in Washington, D. C. They were all propagated experimentally from Brazilian stock. While they did not do well elsewhere, in California they were found so much superior to any types of oranges previously grown that they were soon adopted for commercial orchards. In more recent years Valencia oranges have supplemented the Washington Navel crop in California, and made a continuous year-around supply of oranges from that State.

Florida grows Valencias, too, even more than California. The first oranges in Florida were planted three centuries ago by the Spaniards. Of course you can guess where -- around St. Augustine. People had them as door-yard fruit for many years, but the only way of transporting them for sale was by river-boats. The coming of the railroads to Florida in the sixties made a big difference to orange growers and also to orange eaters.

Right now Florida sends us the mid-season variety for our Christmas stockings. They're called Pineapple oranges. The season for Parson Browns is past. From the middle of March through May come Florida Valencias, and then the California Valencias come on the market about when the Florida season is over. We get a number of oranges from Texas, too, and a few from Arizona, Alabama, and Mississippi. So we are assured of our oranges one way and another throughout the year, and at prices most of us consider moderate in relation to the rest of the budget.

I wish I had time to tell you about the many scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture who have had some part in the tremendous growth of the orange industry. Some have studied the diseases of orange trees and fruit, or the control of citrus insect pests; others have helped in transportation and marketing problems. Still others have found uses for orange by-products, made from wholesome, but off-size fruit,- among them marmalades, pectin, cordials, and wines. They have worked to improve the flavor, color, and keeping quality of canned orange juice. The Weather Bureau furnishes special frost warnings to orange growers so they can set out heaters in their groves.

Market specialists of the Department have encouraged the sorting and grading of oranges. As a result, we housewives find oranges of uniform size packed together in a crate and plainly described. If we want a good family size we can buy 150's or 200's, sure that every orange will be the same. If we like small thin-skinned oranges for juice we can often find good bargains in the 216's or even smaller ones which have been sorted out from the bigger oranges.

The best quality oranges are firm, heavy with juice, and have a fine-textured skin for the variety. Do not worry if you see Florida or Texas oranges somewhat russet in color. This does not affect the flavor. Nor do surface blemishes like slight scars or scratches, unless there are signs of decay. Soft wet spots mean decay, and you cannot cut it away in an orange as you can with some fruits. The taste goes all through the orange. Also avoid puffy, spongy, light-weight oranges which have almost no juice or flavor.

Of course this doesn't mean the "kid-glove" oranges, as some people call the tangerines, Satsumas, King, and mandarin oranges. These have a special pungent flavor of their own, and although the skin is loose they will be juicy, if they seem to be heavy for their size.

If you see the words "color added" stamped on an orange, it means that the orange has gone through a dye bath to give it more orange color. This is permissible if the fruit is fully ripe. The dye is harmless. Another permissible process is treating oranges with ethylene gas, which brings out the natural yellow color of ripe fruit.

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